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ABSTRACT

Students are often provided with background information before reading an assigned selection. This background information functions differently in the following reading variations: individualized reading; basal reading; big book approaches; programmed reading, the language experience approach; and predictable books. Students often pick subjects they are interested in, or know about, when choosing a book for individualized reading. Accompanying manuals provide basal readers with information, while teachers can discuss illustrations in big books. Programmed reading provides information in small increments as the reading progresses. The language experience approach contains no accompanying material, since it is geared towards beginning readers. Stories with predictable endings provide students with a feeling of success. (PM)

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Developing Pupil Background Information for Reading.

ED 478 826

by Marlow Ediger

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DEVELOPING PUPIL BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR READING

Prior to reading an assigned selection, pupils generally have been provided with background information. This information then is used by the pupil to understand what is to be read. How the background information is to be provided varies from one reading program to another. The author will discuss different approaches in developing background information depending upon the plan of instruction being used.

Individualized Reading

Individualized reading may be used in place of the basal reader. Or, both the basal and individualized reading might be stressed in a related fashion. With individualized reading, the pupil selects a library book from among others. A wide variety of titles, genres, and reading levels of library books should be available to the chooser. Generally, the teacher does not assist in providing background information to the pupil since the titles will differ from each other for all or most of the pupils in the classroom. There are, however, assumptions made pertaining to background information provided to the pupil based on the individualized reading program which include the following:

1. The pupil tends to select library books which have familiar sounding information. Thus, previous learnings will provide much of the background information.
2. The pupil chooses library books on the recreational level of reading, not the instructional level, which make it relatively easy to understand most of the new ideas being read.
3. The pupil might select a library book to read which is on the same/similar topic as others he/she has read. These related library books may provide background information for each other.

Following the reading of the library book, the pupil has a conference with the teacher to appraise reading skills and comprehension. The teacher during the conference can assist pupils to fill in the unknown background information, if necessary.

For recreational reading in school or in times of Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), or Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), the pupil selects a library book for reading, but there is no conference covering its contents after the silent reading activity has been completed. Each pupil will usually choose familiar titles, making it so the learner tends to have needed background

information, prior to reading (See also Adams, 1990).

Basal Readers

Basal readers have accompanying manuals which may provide the teacher with much information on objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures for use in teaching pupils. The learning opportunities section will discusses readiness experiences for pupils to achieve objectives. Readiness for pupil reading will include providing background information for learners prior to their reading the ensuing selection in the basal. Background information may be provided in the following manner:

1. discussing the related illustrations in the basal prior to pupils reading the story.
2. answering questions which pupils may have pertaining to the illustrations.
3. seeing the new words in manuscript print on the chalkboard before reading the selection.
4. discussing the contextual meaning of each word and using each in a sentence.
5. encouraging learners to make predictions on what the story will be about, based on the illustrations discussed. Pupils might then read with a purpose in mind and that being to seek information to answer the identified questions while reading (See Cambourne, 1995).

Big Book Approaches

With a Big Book approach, the script is large enough for all pupils to see who are seated in a semi-circle directly in front of the Big Book. The teacher may discuss the illustrations in context with pupils prior to the latter reading the content with teacher guidance. There is no need to introduce the new words to be encountered by the pupils. The teacher reads the selection aloud from the Big Book as pupils follow the script pointed to by the teacher. The teacher may point to each word read aloud. The second time the story is read, pupils may read aloud together with the teacher. Rereading by pupils with teacher assistance may be done as often as desired. Pupils then might read the contents alone to develop a basic sight vocabulary using a whole language approach. No phonics is stressed unless the teacher or the pupil wishes to emphasize selected sound/symbol relationships. However, background pupil information may be developed much like that in using basal readers (Ediger and Rao,

2000, Chapter Seven.

Programmed Reading

With programmed reading, a carefully devised sequence of read, respond, and check, has been worked out by the programmer for pupil learning. There is no pupil input when he/she completes sequential tasks in programmed reading. Thus, the pupil reads a small amount of information, a sentence or two, and then responds to a multiple choice item on the monitor. The test item is valid in that it carefully covers what was in the information read. If correct, the pupil is rewarded. If not, the pupil saw the correct answer and is still ready for the next sequential item to read. Then the learner responds again to a multiple choice test item covering content read, if correct, the pupil feels rewarded. If not, the learner has observed the correct response on the monitor as provided by the programmer. Both the successful and unsuccessful pupil now are ready for the ensuing new information to be read. The order of learning is the same again and again with the pupil reading, responding, and checking.

Generally, there are no pictures related to subject matter to be read. No background information for reading content is then needed. Why? Each program chosen by the teacher is one in which a pupil is successful with a 95 per cent rate of making correct responses. The pupil rarely makes an error in good programmed reading instruction. The order of tasks is arranged in a manner in which the steps of sequence are very small. Each step moves forward very slowly, arranged from the less complex to those increasingly more complex. With the right program, the pupil may work independently by the self.

Readiness factors are inherent within each quality program which has been field tested to take out the kinks. Background information to be developed by the pupil is developed by the individual responding to the programmed items. With a reading curriculum which is on the developmental level of the pupil, success in learning should be an end result with reinforcement theory of learning (Ediger and Rao, 2003, Chapter Eleven).

Linguistic Theory of Reading Instruction

The late Leonard Bloomfield and Harold Fries were early pioneers in linguistic thinking in the teaching of reading. They looked strongly at the structure of the English language when developing their school of linguistic thought. When looking at

the structure of the English language, Bloomfield and Fries believed that pupils looking for patterns should receive priority in reading instruction. To be sure, there are word families which do pattern well consistently. For example, the following do pattern fairly well for beginning reading instruction:
an, ban, can, Dan, fan, man Nan, pan, ran, tan, van.

It is, however, difficult to write meaningful sentences with the use of these words only:

man can fan Dan. Even here, words will need to be added which do not pattern well, such as, "Dan can fan Nan in the tan van." In the spelling curriculum, it does work well to use words in a list which do pattern and contain structure including words ending in the "s," or "ck" pattern.

Both Bloomfield and Fries advocated there be no pictures in the reader for children using their linguistic approach in the teaching of reading. Why? Pictures would distract from having pupils look at the words as they progress in reading. As pupils progress through the grades, there will be less patterning of words, but there will be individual elements which do pattern. This is quite obvious as one looks at children's literature. Pupils, according to Bloomfield and Fries, should focus upon the script, not pictures. Developing background information then was not as important as looking at the English language with its structure and patterns (Ediger and Rao, 2003, Chapter Fifteen).

Language Experience Approach

The language experience approach has no accompanying textbook or library book. This approach is used with young children in learning to read. To provide background information so that pupils may present content to the teacher for recording the ideas on the chalkboard, the latter, for example, may place the following objects on an interest center: models of a cat, dog, horse, cow, and pig. Concrete materials are used to provide the necessary background information. Semi-concrete materials may work equally well.

After pupils have viewed the objects, the teacher may ask for ideas to record. Each idea might be recorded, in manuscript letters, as given. The teacher may also wish to modify a sentence given in an atmosphere of respect. After the recording has been completed, the teacher together with pupils read the recorded ideas as the former points to the ideas being read. Rereading is welcomed so that pupils develop a basic sight vocabulary. Learners may mention items pertaining to phonics such as two words beginning with or ending with the same letter.

It depends upon the teacher as to how much developmental phonics he/she wishes to emphasize (See Stanovich, 1986).

Predictable Books

Predictable literature has received much attention in the reading curriculum. These are stories or books containing literature which makes it somewhat easy for pupils to predict what will be in the contents. There is definite familiarity in content read as to what the story will be about. A pupil then is reading subject matter which sounds more familiar, than is usually the case. The content also has repeating ideas, but different words are used in the script. Learners when choosing books to read in DEAR may select those with predictable ideas. There is joy in being able to read more fluently when choosing these kinds of books to read. The author likes to refresh his thinking on famous philosophers when reading subject matter which has familiarity or a familiar sound. Predictable stores chosen by the reader to read silently may have its very own background ideas. What sounds familiar then has been said in different words than that read previously.

In introducing predictable stories from a basal reader, the teacher may write the new words on the chalkboard in neat manuscript letters. Pupils then look at each word carefully and obtain the related contextual meaning as it would be in the story. Predictable stories have much to recommend themselves in that pupils develop feelings of success in reading (See also Hibbing and Erickson, 2003).

Principles of Learning

When the teacher assists pupils in securing background information for reading a selection, there are selected tenets from education psychology which might well provide important guidance for teachers to follow, including the following:

1. pupils should be actively engaged in these learning opportunities. Active involvement, rather than pupils being passive, is truly essential. A teacher needs to observe if pupils are paying attention to background information being presented. Illustrations, filmstrips, slides, video tapes, CD ROMS, and DVDs may be used here in providing background information to help pupils focus on what is salient.
2. pupils need to understand the background information.

Time is wasted in teaching and learning if pupils do not attach meaning to the background information presented. Pupils need to raise questions about what is not understood. They need to be involved in discussing meanings pertaining to background information.

3. pupils need to become motivated readers. Motivation increases energy levels for learning. The teacher then needs to plan strategies for teaching reading which has a motivational effect for learners. Thus the teacher may use voice inflection such as pitch, stress, and juncture to attract pupil attention in ongoing reading lessons. Then too, the teacher may vary procedures in guiding pupils to obtain background information. Changing off with the use of inductive and deductive approaches is one way of varying procedures of instruction. Materials of instruction is another way such as using concrete, semiconcrete, and abstract materials, can truly provide a plethora of procedures to use in teaching.

4. pupils need to have individual differences met. Selected pupils like to be taught in cooperative learning whereas others prefer to work by the self as in individualized reading. Learning styles theory needs careful consideration in teaching pupils in reading. The individual talents of learners also must be incorporated into instructional planning. This brings into focus the use of multiple intelligences theory of instruction.

5. pupil purpose in reading needs to be fostered. Purposes vary such as a child liking to read animal stories whereas another learner prefers a different genera. Background information will vary according to individual pupil needs. Thus with individualized reading, the pupil must bring background information to the reading selection whereas in basal reader use the teacher supplies background knowledge to learners based on the story to be read.

6. pupil interests need to be extended. Thus, with background information provided in reading a predictable book, the teacher may suggest and very briefly tell about additional titles to read on the same topic. Encouragement to read is a key concept to stress.

7. pupil self appraisal needs to be emphasized. There needs to be ample time to evaluate the self in knowledge possessed for being ready to read. Thus, pupils are encouraged to ask questions pertaining to what is not understood. To frequently, pupils feel that the asking of questions reveals the self to be inferior; however, a truly curious person has an inward desire to learn and to understand.

The teacher needs to follow the above named criteria for teaching within the framework of the kind of reading program emphasized. Background information is an important concept to stress in any reading program. Pupils do improve in word recognition and in comprehension skills when that vital ingredient of background information has be fulfilled (Ediger, 1995, Chapter Four).

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